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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 NEAE-00 DHA-02
MCT-01 EB-08 TRSE-00 COME-00 OMB-01 CU-02 /064 W
----------211618Z 023936 /50
O P 211215Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 453
INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY
AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY
AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 2718

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PK, PINT
SUBJECT: PAKISTAN POLITICAL SITUATION

REF: LAHORE 0238 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY
GOVERNMENT HAS ANNOUNCED RELEASE OF TOP OPPOSITION LEADERS
TO ALLOW THEM TO ATTEND PNA SESSION WHICH IS TO CONSIDER
REPLY TO THIRD BHUTTO LETTER TO OPPOSITION. ASGHAR KHAN
HAS REPORTEDLY REFUSED TO COME OUT UNTIL ALL POLITICAL
PRISONERS ARE RELEASED AND EMERGENCY LIFTED. IN HIS
MESSAGE TO PNA CHIEF MUFTI MEHMUD, WHICH HAS BEEN MADE PUBLIC,
PM SOUGHT TO TAKE OSTENSIBLY REASONABLE AND CONSILIATORY
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LINE, WHILE HEWING TO BASIC POSITION HE HAS TAKEN SINCE
EXCHANGE OF LETTER BEGAN MARCH 13. HE RESUMED HIS INVITATION
TO A DIALOGUE, WHILE REJECTING, IMPLICITLY BUT CLEARLY, THE
VNI DEMAND THAT NEW ELECTIONS BE HELD TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY,
ISSUE WHICH MUFTI HAS SAID IS THE ONLY THING TO DISCUSS.
MEANWHILE, PROCESSIONS CONTINUED IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF COUNTRY,
LEADING TO VIOLENCE IN SEVERAL PLACES. SITUATION IN LAHORE

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HAS WORSENED. HYDERBARD WAS AGAIN A TROUBLE SPOT. (KARACHI SITUATION BEING REPORTED SEPARATELY BY CONGEN THERE.)

WE BELIEVE PM'S DECISION TO RELEASE THE OPPOSITION LEADERS IS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS ON THE PM'S PART, AND, MORE IMPORTANT, THAT IT IS LIKELY TO BE REGARDED AS SUCH BY THE OPPOSITION AND THE PAKISTAN PUBLIC. WE DON'T EXPECT OPPOSITION WILL AGREE TO TALKS EXCEPT ON ITS OWN TERMS, PARTICULARLY IF IT SENSES AS WE BELIEVE IT DOES THAT THE PM IS IN RETREAT. WE SUSPECT THAT

DEVELOPMENTS OVER THIS PAST EVENTFUL WEEKEND WILL ADD TO THOSE WHO HAVE CONCLUDED THAT BHUTTO'S DAYS ARE NUMBERED.
END SUMMARY.

1. IN SURPRISE MOVE ANNOUNCED NIGHT OF MARCH 20/21, THE GOVERNMENT STATED IT HAD ORDERED THE RELEASE OF FOUR SENIOR LEADERS OF THE PAKISTAN NATIONALALLIANCE TO ATTEND THE PNA MEETING TO BE CONVENED AT LAHORE MARCH 21 BY ALLIANCE CHIEF MUFTI MEHMUD. LEADERS BEING RELEASED ARE ASHAR KHAN, PNA GENERAL SECRETARY GHAFOOR AHMED, SHERBAZ MAZARI, AND MAULANA SHAH AHMAD NOORANI. ANNOUNCEMENT SAID RELEASE WAS BEING ORDERED AS CONSEQUENCE OF CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGED BETWEEN PM AND MUFTI MEHMUD. TEXT OF THIS CORRESPONDENCE WAS RELEASED IN RAWALPINDI AT MIDNIGHT MARCH 20/21 AND WAS PUBLISHED IN THIS MORNING'S PAPERS.

2. CONSULATE GENERAL LAHORE, QUOTING INFORMATION RECEIVED AT 1300 THIS AFTERNOON FROM RELIABLE TEHRIK LEADER M. ANWAR, CONFIDENTIAL

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REPORTS THAT ASGHAR KHAN, NOW BEING HELD IN JAIL IN LAHORE, HAS REFUSED TO COME OUT UNTIL ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS IN COUNTRY ARE RELEASED AND EMERGENCY LIFTED.

3. TEXT OF LETTERS. CORRESPONDENCE RELEASED INCLUDES TE OF THIRD EXCHANGE BETWEEN TWO SIDES -- PM BHUTTO'S LONG LETTER TO MUFTI OF MARCH 19 AND MUFTI'S BRIEF REPLY SENT FOLLOWING DAY. IN HIS MESSAGE, PM SOUGHT TO TAKE OSTENSIBLY REASONABLE AND CONCILIATORY LINE, WHILE HEWING TO BASIC POSITION HE HAS TAKEN SINCE EXCHANGE OF LETTERS BEGAN MARCH 13. HE RESUMED HIS INVITATION TO A DIALOGUE, WHILE REJECTING, IMPLICITLY BUT CLEARLY, THE PNA DEMAND THAT NEW ELECTIONS BE HELD TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, ISSUE WHICH MUFTI HAS SAID IS THE ONLY THING TO DISCUSS. WITH AN OBVIOUS EYE ON PUBLIC OPINION,

PM CONDEMNED THE DISRUPTIVE TACTICS OF THE OPPOSITION, WHICH HE SAID COULD ONLY BE HARMFUL TO THE POOR PEOPLE OF PAKISTAN AND HAD LED TO DISLOCATION OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE, INCLUDING A JUMP IN PRICES. (PM TARTLY RECALLED THAT

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OPPOSITION HAD MADE EARLIER PRICE RISES A KEY CAMPAIGN ARGUMENT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT.) BUT BHUTTO ALSO SOUGHT TO CREATE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS DEALING FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH. REJECTING MUFTI MEHMUD'S PRACTICE OF ADDRESSING HIM AS PPP CHAIRMAN, BHUTTO STATED THAT "MY PARTY HAS SECURED AN OVER-WHELMING VOTE OF CONFIDENCE FROM THE ELECTORATE, WHICH NO FALSE CHARGES OF RIGGING, NO MATTER HOW STRIDENT AND SWEEPING, CAN THROW INTO DISPUTE. IT IS AS THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE COUNTRY THAT I AM ENDEAVORING TO ACCOMMODATE THOSE DEMANDS FROM YOUR SIDE WHICH MAY BE LEGITIMATE." IN THIS CONNECTION, HE CITED WHAT HE TERMED GOVERNMENT'S "POLICY OF MODERATION" AND ITS EARLIER DECISION TO FACILITATE THE PROCESSING OF SPECIFIC ELECTION COMPLAINTS. CONDEMNING THE OPPOSITION FOR ITS "UNCONSTITUTIONAL" MOVES AND ATTITUDES, HE NEVERTHELESS

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 2718

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ASSURED MEHMUD THAT "THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO FOLLOW OR RETURN TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL PATH WILL HAVE A FULL OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY THEIR REPRESENTATIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE."

4. IN HIS REPLY, MUFTI MEHMUD MERELY STATED THAT HE COULD NOT ANSWER BHUTTO'S THIRD LETTER UNLESS HE CONSULTED THE LEADERS OF THE PNA, MOST OF WHOM HE POINTED OUT ARE IN JAIL. HE CALLED FOR THEIR IMMEDIATE RELEASE SO THAT HE COULD CONVENE A PNA MEETING EVENING MARCH 21. ANNOUNCEMENT OF RELEASE FOLLOWED A FEW HOURS LATER.

5. PNA PROCESSIONS REPORTEDLY CONTINUED IN MANY PARTS OF PAKISTAN ON MARCH 21, AND VIOLENT CLASHES BETWEEN POLICE AND DEMONSTRATORS IN SEVERAL PLACES. (SITUATION IN KARACHI BEING REPORTED BY CONGEN THERE IN SEPTEL.) ACCORDING TO CONGEN CONFIDENTIAL

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LAHORE, SITUATION THERE WORSENED. PRESS REPORTS THAT TEAR GAS WAS USED INDISCRIMINATELY AT SEVERAL PLACES. KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES INFORMED US THAT RESIDENTS OF AFFECTED AREA POURED BOILING WATER DOWN ON POLICE, IN ADDITION TO WHAT HAS NOW BECOME CUSTOMARY PRACTICE OF HURLING STONES AND BRICKBATS. CONGEN NOTES THAT RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS IN LAHORE HAVE BEEN LOCALIZED AND SELDOM LAST MORE THAN AN HOUR OR TWO, BUT QUANTUM OF VIOLENCE HAS INCREASED -- MORE LATHI CHARGES, MORE TEAR GASSING, MORE BURNINGS, MORE ATTACKS ON POLICE. CONGEN ADDS THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE HOW LONG PNA CAN MAINTAIN THIS TEMPO, OR IF IT CAN BE INCREASED.

6. ELSEWHERE IN PUNJAB OVERALL SITUATION IS HARD TO DETERMINE BECAUSE PRESS AND MEDIA SOURCES ARE BEING CENSORED. HAWA-I-WAQT (MARCH 21) REPORTS THAT LOCAL PNA LEADERS ADDRESSED PROCESSION IN MULTAN PREVIOUS DAYPLEDGING THAT STRUGGLE WOULD CONTINUE. POLICE WERE STONED AND TWO BUILDINGS SET ON FIRE. A JEEP WAS ALSO BURNED. CROWD BLOCKED WAY AND FIRE BRIGADE COULD NOT ENTER. THERE WERE A NUMBER OF ARRESTS AND FOLLOWING LATHI CHARGES AND TEAR GASSING. SIMILAR EVENTS TOOK PLACE IN GUJRANWALA, WHERE SOME POLICEMEN WERE BADLY HURT WHEN THEY ENETERED A MOSQUE TO LATHI CHARGE CROWD AND MAKE ARRESTS. MOB THREW STONES AND POLICE RETALIATED WITH TEAR GAS. GHULAM DASTIGIR KHAN (PML), MNA-ELECT, WAS AMONG THOSE ARRESTED. VIOLENCE IS BELIEVED TO HAVE ERUPTED IN LYALLPUR AND SOME OTHER TOWNS SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE PROVINCE.

7. HYDERABAD WAS AGAIN ANOTHER TROUBLE SPOT. AN OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN CLAIMED THAT SEVERAL PEOPLE WERE KILLED THERE IN POLICE FIRINGS AND IN SHOOTINGS OF DEMONSTRATORS BY PPP WORK-ERS. A FURTHER HARTAL IS SAID TO HAVE GONE INTO EFFECT THERE.

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(IN TELEGRAM ADDRESSED TO "PRESS CORRESPONDENT VOA AMERICAN CENTER KARACHI" (CHIRMAN PNA ACTION COMMITTEE HYDERABAD ALLEGED THAT POLICE AND SIND ARMED CONSTABULARY HAD FIRED POINTBLANK KILLING FIFTEEN AND INJURING ABOUT 100, MOST OF THEM BOYS AGED TEN TO TWENTY.)
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8. FURTHER PROCESSIONS HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED IN LAHORE AND ELSEWHERE FOR MARCH 21. HOWEVER, PNA HAS NOT CALLED FOR HARTAL ANYWHERE BUT IN KARACHI AS FAR AS WE ARE AWARE.

9. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE PM'S DECISION TO RELEASE THE OPPOSITION LEADERS IS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS ON THE PM'S PART, AND, MORE IMPORTANT, THAT IT IS LIKELY TO BE REGARDED AS SUCH BY THE OPPOSITION AND THE PAKISTANI PUBLIC. THE FACT THAT THE RELEASE FOLLOWED THE KARACHI OUTBREAK AND WAS MADE WITH NO QUID PRO QUO REINFORCES THIS IMPRESSION.WE SEE NO REASON AT THIS TIME TO EXPECT THAT THE OPPOSITION WILL AGREE TO ENTER INTO SUCH A DIALOGUE NOW EXCEPT ON ITS OWN TERMS, PARTICULARLY IF IT SENSES AS WE BELIEVE IT DOES THAT THE PM IS IN RETREAT. AS WE BELIEVE THE OPPOSITION SEES IT, THE PNA HARDLINE POSITION IS PAYING OFF AND ALLIANCE PURPOSES WILL BE BEST SERVED BY TOUGHING IT OUT. INDEED, ASGHAR KHAN'S LATEST STANCE, IF CORRECTLY REPORTED, SEEMS TO REPRESENT AN EFFORT ON THE PART OF THAT PNA "HAWK" FURTHER TO HARDEN THE OPPOSITION LINE. (IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO TELL, OF COURSE, IF THE OTHER LEADERS WILL GO ALONG WITH THE AIR MARSHAL'S REPORTED DEMAND.) NEWS OF MRS. GANDHI'S DEFEAT IS ALSO LIKELY TO PROVE ENCOURAGING TO THE PNA AS IT CARRIES ON ITS EFFORTS TO FORCE BHUTTO OUT.

10. WE REPORTED TWO DAYS BACK (ISLAMABAD 2683) THAT VIEWS OF OBSERVERS ABOUT WHERE THE GOVERNMENT-PPP CONFRONTATION VARY WILDLY. WE SUSPECT THAT DEVELOPMENTS OVER THIS PAST EVENTFUL WEEKEND WILL ADD TO THOSE WHO HAVE CONCLUDED THAT BHUTTO'S DAYS ARE NUMBERED.
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Message Attributes

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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Retention: 0
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Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3051358
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PAKISTAN POLITICAL SITUATION
TAGS: PINT, PK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/f9bdd4b4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
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